

Notes of a Mad Girl #11 - *Indian in Paris*

After my short stint in Oklahoma I returned home to Penn, Pennsylvania. It was spring, 1973, and I needed a plan.

M.A. called from Midland, Michigan to see if I wanted to head to Paris, France with her to study printmaking at the Atelier 17 under S.W. Hayter. Mary Anne had been my roommate during my senior year at the University of Iowa and spending time with M.A. was fun, difficult, often dangerous and stimulating all wrapped tight like a mini tornado.

I immediately wrote my letter to Mr. Hayter requesting room in his Rue Daguerre studio and asked mom to find me the highest paying job in our area. I had not received one cent while working with Martha Grass in Oklahoma and Mom had basically kept her daughter alive via the \$5.00 cash a week she religiously mailed me. Starting off penniless I needed a plump sum to head to Europe by Fall.

Mom worked at the State Unemployment Office of Greensburg, Pennsylvania and suggesting jobs for her kids always put a kind of glint in her eyes. After I rejected the job of singing country western songs at mobile home parks, I found the dream job for a girl needing a passport, backpack, travel money, Paris lodging and Atelier 17 tuition. Pittsburgh Plate Glass in Greensburg had numerous office jobs for women at minimum wage but Mom was excited because PPG was in the process of being taken to task for not offering plant jobs to women. That meant \$15. per hour, time and a half wages for non-daylight shifts and the biggest draw.....double time and a half on holidays.

There were three females in three weight categories. I was the lightweight and I am guessing here but I think the heaviest girl was 150. PPG was determined to keep the girls out of the plant and we were the test piglets.

Our first day began with a demonstration on how to lift a heavy, super hot windshield from one conveyor to another. Everyone started PPG life with this demo. The instructor wore an asbestos vest with arm sleeves and gloves. Safety first. My 115-pound frame successfully repeated his manoeuver. I truly wish I could remember the 150-pound girl's name

but when she lifted the windshield from the horizontal rack and went to flip it to the vertical rack her really, really large and ample breasts rested on the hot windshield. As she was screaming, the instructor's hands went from lifting her breasts off the hot glass to "for god's sake don't do that" to yelling "throw it on the ground". There was a lot of crying and a lot of man angst. I doubt this scene was ever noted in the PPG handbook. This girl literally ran out of the building never to lift another bus windshield again. To everyone's credit in that plant there was not one bit of giggling or laughter at that frantic scene. And in all due respect, two of the male newbies walked out of the building within thirty minutes after her.

Two brawny football players walked off the job after a few weeks saying that no way could I do the jobs they were asked to perform. I was extremely proud that I hoisted, shuffled and swept my way through all the jobs asked of me. Did I get help? Well, my male partners understood that I had to find other ways to handle the shields. I referred to my techniques as "doing girl" yet always did the work.

Some days I drove home a crying mess since there was one guy who on a daily basis, bible in hand, lectured me about girls not working outside the home and my baby making destiny. His package of a girl's life was wrapped tidily with religious fervor and it just wore you down to exasperation while working some long hours.

Another guy would ask me on a regular basis if I knew someone who could clean his house. Naively I thought he needed someone to clean his house but a really fine buddy of mine at PPG translated what I failed to understand as someone to have sex with. I remain perplexed at that analogy even now.

One day I was actually going to go on a motorcycle/dinner date with Ed Komoroski. During the afternoon I put small rollers in my hair and covered the mess with a scarf. After my shift I headed into the seldom-used ladies room, changed into a dress, undid the hair and exited only to be met by the entire gaggle of nearly a hundred male workers.

The work was hard and hot yet by the end of my windshield stint I was happily ensconced in the PPG family and loved every single money making minute.

My friend, Betty Slaney, sewed a lovely travel jacket for me, M.A. arrived in Penn from Michigan, my backpack and supplies were loaded, I had a healthy pocket of money, a letter from Hayter's studio stating that I was on the waiting list of students and a mom in the hospital recovering from a painful back operation.

I didn't see the next bit coming by a long shot. M.A. and I happily wore our backpacks into the hospital where Mom started to cry and wanted to give me her wedding ring to remember her by. We then headed to Hockensmith Corporation in Penn to say Au revoir to my dad. Standing there in his hard hat he also started to cry and begged me not to go. He needed me at home, Europe was too far away for anyone other than a person fighting in the second world war and that even after talking about leaving for six months he didn't think I'd really do this.

My sister Pam was getting fairly nervous by now since she was driving us to the Pittsburgh airport in her small canary yellow beetle. They held the plane for us as we raced to the gate and we gladly accepted the glares of the passengers who patiently waited for two girls to get on the damn plane.

We landed in Copenhagen and then hitch hiked South to Paris. We found rooms at the Foundation des Etats Unis and headed out to our first day of class at the Atelier 17. During Stanley Hayter's introduction I sat quietly waiting to introduce myself. Two American kids in the same waiting list boat as I rattled on about their glorious printmaking achievements only to be loudly extricated by the great man himself. I said nothing. So for five days I showed up on the steps of the Atelier and waited for M.A. to finish her work. The Foundation was student housing only and I mentioned to them that I was merely waiting for my formal letter of admission. So I was Atelier-less and Hayter-petrified. On the last class day of the week Mr. Hayter walked up to me and asked "who the hell are you?". I quietly pulled out my letter of non-committal, mentioned my friendship with my University of Iowa friend M.A. and said

I would be honored if I could study under his print lordship. He said to “get the hell inside and start working”.

But this story has little to do with my windshield making skills or Atelier 17. It has to do with my former life with my Indian friends back in Oklahoma. On one hand I recently went from being shocked at the deplorable treatment of my Indian friends by my white man tribe; eating pepper soup and fry bread; Indian languages that worked best as song; a landscape surrounded by fields of orange grasses; screaming locusts and howling coyotes; and the most stunning flaming red sunsets you will ever witness to the other hand with a congested landscape filled with hundreds of years of art, religious and architectural history; a new language; best pastries, pate and baguettes ever; and an Atelier driven by a monolithic, famous and dynamic man. Not only was Hayter vigorous at 73 he was also a slippery fondler of young girls, Well I can say with certainty he was an embarrassing fondler of me and I spent a good deal of time squirming away from his right hand.

And then un-expectantly there it lay. Walking out of the Foundation door I looked down. It was a pinkish, plastic toy Indian with a bow at the ready to shoot. With a certainty I have only seen owned by my Indian friends I knew I had received a sign from Martha Grass that you can be an Indian in Paris, an Indian anywhere. I picked it up, pocketed it, smiled broadly and headed to the metro comfortable in my own skin. I could make bus windshields and I could be an Indian in Paris.

Side note: Our own United Nations of students were working hard printing one day when someone asked what we missed most from our own countries that were not found in Paris. I remarked that I missed French fries. Everyone stopped working immediately and stared. A friend said “say it slowly”. We all laughed hysterically, closed the shop for the day and with the formidable Stanley Hayter in tow we crossed the street to the small café and ordered huge plates of pomme frites. With mustard not ketchup. It was a glorious day.